

**REMARKS**

The Applicant has carefully reviewed the Office Action of July 5, 2002. In response, Applicant amends claims 1, 4 and 11 to more clearly distinguish these claims from the cited prior art and place this application in condition for allowance.

When considering the patentability of the present application, it is imperative that the Examiner consider the full disclosure of the text of the application. In the text, a clear distinction is made between a wiring harness and appropriate plug to allow electrical connection between the electrical system of a towing vehicle and the operating lights of a trailer and a DC and/or AC utility power outlet. This is made particularly clear at, for example, page 2 lines 4-13 and page 7 lines 1-23 (note reference to AC utility power outlet 50, DC utility power outlet 60 and trailer light plug 40).

Claims 1, 2, 4, 5 and 11 very clearly patentably distinguish over U.S. Patent 5,904,261 to Belinky et al. The Belinky et al. patent discloses a trailer hitch receiver assembly incorporating a box 10 housing a trailer light plug 40 such as a standard recreational vehicle seven-way harness plug. As clearly defined in the present patent application, the DC utility power outlet of claims 1 and 2, the AC utility power outlet of claims 4 and 5 and the utility power outlet of claim 11 are not equivalent to a trailer light plug as taught in the Belinky et al. patent. Specifically, as defined, the utility power outlets are not utilized to connect to or power the trailer light and braking systems. Instead, the utility power outlets are designed to power electrical equipment other than the trailer.

The concept of equipping a trailer hitch assembly with both a trailer light plug and a utility power outlet for powering equipment other than a trailer is simply not taught or suggested in the Belinky et al. patent. This is made very clear from reviewing the Belinky et al. patent. In particular the Examiner's attention is directed to column 1 lines 13-45 wherein it is very clear that it is the objective of the Belinky et al. patent to provide

a protecting enclosure for the trailer light plug utilized to power the light and brake systems of the trailer. No consideration whatsoever is given to the concept of adding a utility power outlet to a trailer hitch receiver assembly for powering electrical equipment other than the trailer systems. Accordingly, it is very clear that claims 1, 2, 4, 5 and 11 patentably distinguish over the Belinky et al. patent and the rejection of these claims under 35 U.S.C. §102 should clearly be withdrawn.

Similarly, claims 3 and 6 patentably distinguish over the Belinky et al. patent even when it is considered in combination with U.S. Patent 6,171,118 to Witkowski et al. The Witkowski et al. patent refers to a cord plug with a protector cap specifically adapted for powering a vehicle accessory such as a cold weather starting device from a wall outlet or generator. In the Witkowski patent, the device is provided as a convenient means to transfer power from a wall outlet or generator to a vehicle accessory mounted on the vehicle. This is the opposite of the present invention wherein the utility power outlet is provided as a convenient means for transferring power from the vehicle to another separate electrical accessory. Further, it should be appreciated that the Witkowski et al. reference does not teach mounting any form of utility power outlet to a trailer hitch receiver assembly.

Since (1) the primary reference to Belinky et al. is only concerned with a trailer light plug and does not in any way suggest the provision of any form of utility power outlet on a trailer hitch receiver assembly and (2) the secondary reference to Witkowski et al. is only related to the connection of vehicle accessories to an electrical wall outlet or other remote power source, the combination of references clearly fails to provide any sound basis for rejecting claims 3 and 6. Stated another way, neither of the cited references provide any teaching relevant to the basic premise of the present invention as claimed: that is, the provision of a trailer hitch receiver assembly with both a trailer light plug and a utility electrical outlet for powering electrical accessories other than a trailer by means of the vehicle. Accordingly, claims 3 and 6 should be allowed.

Claim 12 also patentably distinguishes over the Belinky et al. patent when considered in combination with U.S. Patent 4,936,796 to Anderson, Jr. Figure 5 of the Anderson, Jr. patent discloses a switch box including an electrical utility outlet. It, however, is significant to note that the box is not taught as being mountable to a trailer hitch receiver assembly. As such, the Anderson, Jr. patent clearly does not teach the present invention. Further, since the primary reference to Belinky et al. gives no consideration whatsoever nor does it in any way suggest providing a trailer hitch receiver assembly with any form of utility power outlet, the proposed combination of references also fails to provide any basis whatsoever for the rejection of present claim 12. Specifically, the step of providing a trailer hitch receiver assembly with both a trailer light plug and a utility power outlet is simply not suggested by either of these references when considered alone or in combination. Thus, claim 12 should be allowed.

Likewise, claim 13 very clearly patentably distinguishes over the Belinky et al. patent even when considered in combination with U.S. Patent 5,766,020 to Hughes. The Hughes patent discloses a power adapter apparatus including interchangeable adapter bodies that allow the trailer harness to be used to power the lighting and brake system of a trailer or other electronic or household appliances. In considering the Belinky et al. and Hughes patents in combination, one might find it obvious to utilize the adapter to alter the function of the trailer light plug 40 held in the enclosure 10 of the Belinky et al. patent. Still, one would not find it obvious to provide a separate utility power outlet in addition to a trailer light plug as set forth and claimed in the present invention.

Further, it should be appreciated that the present structure has a number of advantages over the combined structure proposed by the Examiner. Specifically, separate plugs allow an individual to power an electrical device other than the trailer while simultaneously maintaining vehicle connection to the trailer light and brake systems. This can be a significant advantage. For example, when changing a flat tire one could use the utility power outlet to power a light for lighting the work area during

the tire change while simultaneously powering the emergency flashers of the trailer to provide a warning to oncoming vehicles. In contrast, in the structure proposed by the Examiner through the combination of the Belinky et al. and Hughes patents, dual function is not possible: that is, the operator must choose between either powering the emergency flashers of the trailer or powering the utility light. This is because the adapter of Hughes will not allow simultaneous connection to a trailer and a utility light and, therefore, will not allow simultaneous function. Accordingly, it is very clear that the present invention represents a significant advance in the art totally differing from the structure upon which the Examiner bases a rejection. Thus, claim 13 should be allowed.

It should also be appreciated that claims 1-10 clearly patentably distinguish over U.S. Patent 6,080,014 to Steiler. The Steiler patent is similar to the Belinky et al. patent in that Steiler discloses an enclosure for a trailer light plug that may be secured to a cross member of a trailer hitch receiver assembly. The fact that the Steiler patent strictly relates to a trailer light plug and not a utility power outlet is made clear when reviewing the Steiler patent.

With regard to present claims 1-3, Steiler clearly does not teach or suggest a trailer hitch receiver assembly equipped with both a trailer light plug and a DC utility power outlet as claimed. With regard to present claims 4-6, Steiler clearly does not teach or suggest a trailer hitch receiver assembly equipped with both a trailer light plug and an AC utility power outlet as claimed. With regard to claims 7-10, Steiler clearly does not teach or suggest a trailer hitch receiver assembly equipped with both a DC utility power outlet and an AC utility power outlet as claimed.

New claim 14 further provides that the trailer hitch receiver assembly is equipped with a trailer light plug in addition to the two utility power outlets. There is no suggestion whatsoever to provide such a structure in Steiler. Accordingly, claim 14 should also be allowed.

In summary, all the pending claims patentably distinguish over the prior art and should be formally allowed. None of the cited references in any way teach or suggest the provision of a trailer hitch receiver assembly incorporating both a trailer light plug for connection of the electrical system of the vehicle to a trailer and a separate utility power outlet for connection of the vehicle to some other electrical device or appliance. Upon careful review and consideration it is believed the Examiner will agree with this proposition. Accordingly, the early issuance of a formal notice of allowance is earnestly solicited.

If any fees are required pertaining to this response, the Applicant requests that they be charged to Deposit Account number 11-0978.

Respectfully submitted,

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8

S.N. 09/864,027

Docket No. 242-140

Patent

**IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE**

In re application of

Thomas W. Lindenman et al.

Serial No.: 09/864,027

Filed: May 23, 2001

For: HITCH RECEIVER ASSEMBLY WITH  
AC AND/OR DC UTILITY OUTLET**RECEIVED**

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**GROUP 3600**

Group Art Unit: 3619

Examiner: Royal, Paul

**VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE**

1. (Amended) A trailer hitch receiver assembly for towing a trailer behind a towing vehicle, comprising:
  - a frame member including a hitch receiver box;
  - at least one mounting bracket carried on said frame member for securing said frame member to the vehicle; [and]
  - a trailer light plug; and
  - a DC utility power outlet.
  
4. A trailer hitch receiver assembly for towing a trailer behind a towing vehicle, comprising:
  - a frame member including a hitch receiver box;
  - at least one mounting bracket carried on said frame member for securing said frame member to the vehicle; [and]
  - a trailer light plug; and
  - an AC utility power outlet.

11. A method of powering an electrical device from a trailer hitch receiver assembly, comprising:

providing a trailer hitch receiver assembly with a utility power outlet and a trailer light plug; and

powering said utility power outlet from said towing vehicle to which the trailer hitch assembly is connected.

14. The trailer hitch receiver assembly of claim 7 further including a trailer light plug.